Phil 3530  Environmental Ethics

Course Description

In this course, we will carefully consider moral questions that involve the environment. There is a wide range of topics to cover. We'll begin by thinking about what we'll call *ethical extensionism*. What is the appropriate range of moral obligations? Do we only have moral obligations to other human beings? All sentient beings? All living beings? Do we have obligations to ecosystems? Do we have obligations to abstractions like *species*? Can we have obligations to species that are more compelling than obligations to individual living beings?

We'll then turn to the issue of environmental justice. Whose interests should we have in mind when we create environmental policy? We'll look at this issue both locally and globally. We'll take into account the disproportionate impacts of environmental choices like where to place polluting institutions such as dumps and petrochemical plants. We'll also consider differing environmental needs and concerns in developing and non-western nations.

We'll talk about the nature of our moral obligations to non-human animals. What forms of life should be the subject of our moral concern? What moral principles justify arguments for various positions on this topic? What implications does that have for our eating, research, and entertainment practices?

We'll dedicate ourselves in the later part of the course to a cluster of questions related to global climate change. We'll think about whether we have obligations to future generations and, if so, what burdens society is obligated to take on to satisfy those obligations. We'll consider what our response to climate change ought to be. Is it morally acceptable to geoengineer the climate—to do things like changing the chemical composition of the stratosphere or the ocean—to roll back the effects of climate change?

Throughout, we'll be thinking about sustainability and which, if any, changes we ought to make to our ordinary practices in order to satisfy our moral obligations to all.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Understand the range and depth of moral challenges related to the environment.
2. Work through moral issues in nuanced and thoughtful ways.
3. Identify, understand, and reasonably respond to the points of view of people with whom you disagree.
4. Articulate a well-reasoned world-view on issues related to the environment.

Instructor

Rachel D. Robison-Greene, Ph.D.
435-797-0340 | rachel.robison@usu.edu |
Office: Old Main 002H
Office Hours: Fridays 2:30-3:20 and by appointment on Zoom.

Course Resources

Textbook:

- Other readings are available here on Canvas.

Course Requirements

Each student will:

1. Contribute to weekly discussion boards. Each student must provide their own response to the question prompt and respond in a meaningful way to the contribution of another student. (200 points, 20% of the course grade).
2. Take two exams, a midterm (250 points, 25% of the course grade) and a final (250 points, 25% of the course grade). The questions on the exams will be a combination of true/false and multiple choice questions.
   - The Midterm will be available March 3rd-March 5th on Canvas.
   - The Final will be available April 29th-May 5th on Canvas.
3. Complete an environmental position paper on the topic of the student's choosing.
Evaluation Methods and Criteria

Every assignment will include a corresponding rubric that will allow the student to get a sense of the standards that will be employed in grading.

Grade Scheme

The following grading standards will be used in this class:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
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Course Schedule/Outline

Week One (January 19th-January 22nd):

Introduction to Ethics and Environmental Ethics. The big questions for the week are: What is the study of ethics, generally? What distinguishes ethical questions from questions of law, religion, or etiquette? What are the branches of ethics? What is the scope of the study of environmental ethics?

Required Reading:
Introduction by Paul Pojman (Links to an external site.)

Due January 22nd: Discussion One: Introductions

Week Two (January 25th-January 29th):

Subjectivism, Relativism, and Moral Theory. The big questions for the week are: Are ethical judgments simply a matter of taste? Are ethical judgments culturally relative? Are moral claims objective?

Required Reading:

What is Ethics? by Katie McShane (Links to an external site.) What is Ethics (pg. 3)

Due January 29th: Discussion Two.

Week Three (February 1st-February 5th):

Introduction to Normative Ethical Theory, Key Terminology in Environmental Ethics, and Biocentrism. The big questions for the week are: What have philosophers thought about the nature of ethics throughout history? What is ethical extensionism? What is moral status? What is comparative moral worth? What is biocentrism?

Required Reading:

Reverence for Life by Albert Schweitzer (Links to an external site.)

Due February 5th: Discussion Three.

Week Four (February 8th-February 12th):

Ecocentrism and Holism. The big questions for the week are: Do we have moral obligations only to individuals who are capable of having conscious experiences? Do we have obligations to abstractions like species or systems? Do we have moral obligations to ecosystems?

Required Reading:

The Land Ethics by Aldo Leopold (Links to an external site.)

Due February 12th: Discussion Four.

Week Five (February 15th-February 19th):
Environmental Justice Part One. The big questions for the week are: How do we decide where to build society's biggest polluters like oil refineries, waste dumps, factory farms, and petrochemical plants? Do our decisions about these matters harm some people more than others? If so, what should we do about it?

Required Reading:

Overcoming Racism in Environmental Decision Making by Robert D. Bullard (Links to an external site.)

Due February 19th: Discussion Five.

Week Six (February 22nd-February 26th):.

Environmental Justice Part Two. The big questions for the week are: Is society satisfying its obligations to indigenous populations? How does society treat indigenous knowledge? How might we all learn from indigenous populations? On a global scale, should conservation be our top priority? What are the social conditions that give rise to environmental problems across the globe?

Required Reading:

Radical Environmentalism and Wilderness Protection by Ramachandra Guha (Links to an external site.)

Indigenous Knowledge and Technology: Creating Environmental Justice in the Twenty-First Century by Linda Robyn (Links to an external site.)

Due February 26th: Discussion Six.

Week Seven (March 1st-March 5th): Review and Exam. This week there will be a study guide posted. We'll do a Zoom review on Wednesday to prepare you for the test. There will be no new material presented this week to allow you to focus on preparation for the exam.

Midterm Exam Available March 3rd-March 5th on Canvas.

Week Eight (March 8th-March 12th): Animal Ethics Part One. The big questions for this week are: What characteristics does a being need to have in order for it to be deserving of moral consideration? What is the difference between saying that non-human animals have rights and saying that we should care about the welfare of non-human animals? What should we think about practices such as using animals for food, entertainment, clothing, and research?

Required Reading:
Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth by Immanuel Kant (from Lectures on Ethics) (Links to an external site.)

Due March 12th: Discussion Seven.

Week Nine (March 15th-March 19th): Animal Ethics Part Two. The big questions for the week are: What does it mean to say that animals have rights? How might our obligations to non-human animals be different if we conclude that they have rights than they might have been if we concluded only that we ought to care for their welfare? Do only beings that can exercise autonomy have rights? Does the possession of rights require the ability to understand those rights?

Required Reading:

A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation by Peter Singer (Links to an external site.)
The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights by Tom Regan (Links to an external site.)

Due March 19th: Discussion Eight.

Due March 15th: Term Paper Rough Draft

Week Ten (March 22nd-March 26th): Global Climate Change Part One. The big questions for the week are: What should we make of the disagreement among the population that we find on the issue of whether human beings are responsible for climate change? What should we make of the fact that modeling that predicts climate future varies from scientist to scientist and sometimes turn out to be inaccurate? How do we know we're not wrong?

Required Reading:

The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change: How Do We Know We're not Wrong? by Naomi Oreskes (Links to an external site.)

Due March 26th: Discussion Nine.

Week Eleven (March 29th-April 2nd): Global Climate Change Part Two. The big questions for the week are: Should the countries that contributed the most to climate change be the countries who pay for mitigation solutions? How should we allocate carbon emissions in the future. Do people have a right to subsistence level carbon emissions? If so, what counts as a subsistence level of carbon emissions?

Required Reading:

Ethics and Global Climate Change: An Introduction by Stephen M. Gardiner (Links to an external site.)
Due April 2nd: Discussion Ten.

Week Twelve (April 5th-April 9th): Geoengineering and Intergenerational Justice. The big questions for the week are: Are we justified in making major changes to our planet in order to reduce the effects of climate change? Is it morally responsible to engage in geoengineering? Is geoengineering the lesser of two evils? What obligations do we have to future generations and how should those obligations be carried out?

Required Reading:

Rethinking the Unthinkable: Environmental Ethics and the Presumptive Argument Against Geoengineering by Christopher J. Preston (Links to an external site.)
Intergenerational Justice by Richard B. Howarth (Links to an external site.)

Week Thirteen (April 12th-16th): Sustainability. What does it mean to say that a practice is sustainable? What are we trying to sustain? For whom are we trying to sustain these things? How can we ensure that sustainability demands are equitable across populations? What is the relationship between capitalism and sustainability?

Required Reading:

Sustainable Development: Economic Myths and Ecological Realities by William E. Rees (Links to an external site.)
At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima: Why Political Questions are not All Economic by Mark Sagoff (Links to an external site.)

Week Fourteen (April 19th-23rd): Review and Catch-Up

Due April 19th: Final Paper

Week Fifteen and Sixteen (April 26th-May 5th) Final Exam
Final Exam April 29th-May 5th on Canvas

Library Services
All USU students attending classes in Logan, at our Regional Campuses, or online can access all databases, e-journals, and e-books regardless of location. Additionally, the library will mail printed books to students at no charge to them. Students can also borrow books from any Utah academic library. Take advantage of all library services and learn more at libguides.usu.edu/rc. (Links to an external site.)

Classroom Civility

Utah State University supports the principle of freedom of expression for both faculty and students. The University respects the rights of faculty to teach and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights requires classroom conditions that do not impede the learning process. Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated. An individual engaging in such behavior may be subject to disciplinary action. Read Student Code Article V Section V-3 (Links to an external site.) for more information.

University Policies & Procedures

COVID-19 Classroom Protocols

In order to continue to provide a high standard of instruction at USU, and to limit the spread of COVID-19 during the pandemic, students are asked to follow certain classroom protocols. These protocols are in place not only for your safety but also the safety of the rest of the campus community. You will be asked to clean your desk area at the start of each class, sit in designated seats, wear face coverings, and follow dismission instructions. There may be individual medical circumstances that prevent some students from using face coverings. These circumstances will be rare, but if they do exist, we ask that everyone be respectful. It is imperative that we each do our part so that on-campus instruction can continue.

Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibilities

Academic freedom is the right to teach, study, discuss, investigate, discover, create, and publish freely. Academic freedom protects the rights of faculty members in teaching and of students in learning. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Faculty members are entitled to full freedom in teaching, research, and creative activities, subject to the limitations imposed by professional responsibility. Faculty Code Policy #403 (Links to an external site.) further defines academic freedom and professional responsibilities.

Academic Integrity – “The Honor System"

Each student has the right and duty to pursue his or her academic experience free of dishonesty. To enhance the learning environment at Utah State University and to develop student academic integrity, each student agrees to the following Honor Pledge: "I pledge, on my honor, to conduct myself with the foremost level of academic integrity." A student who lives by the Honor Pledge is a student who does more than not cheat, falsify, or plagiarize. A student who lives by the Honor Pledge:
Espouses academic integrity as an underlying and essential principle of the Utah State University community;
Understands that each act of academic dishonesty devalues every degree that is awarded by this institution; and
Is a welcomed and valued member of Utah State University.

Academic Dishonesty

The instructor of this course will take appropriate actions in response to Academic Dishonesty, as defined the University’s Student Code. Acts of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- **Cheating**: using, attempting to use, or providing others with any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, examinations, or in any other academic exercise or activity. Unauthorized assistance includes:
  - Working in a group when the instructor has designated that the quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity be done “individually;”
  - Depending on the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
  - Substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, in taking an examination or preparing academic work;
  - Acquiring tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty member, staff member, or another student without express permission;
  - Continuing to write after time has been called on a quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity;
  - Submitting substantially the same work for credit in more than one class, except with prior approval of the instructor; or engaging in any form of research fraud.

- **Falsification**: altering or fabricating any information or citation in an academic exercise or activity.

- **Plagiarism**: representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one's own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes using materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the sale of term papers or other academic materials.

For additional information go to: [ARTICLE VI. University Regulations Regarding Academic Integrity (Links to an external site.)](#)

Sexual Harassment/Title IX
Utah State University is committed to creating and maintaining an environment free from acts of sexual misconduct and discrimination and to fostering respect and dignity for all members of the USU community. Title IX and USU Policy 339 ([Links to an external site.]) address sexual harassment in the workplace and academic setting. The university responds promptly upon learning of any form of possible discrimination or sexual misconduct. Any individual may contact USU’s Office of Equity ([Links to an external site.]) for available options and resources or clarification. The university has established a complaint procedure to handle all types of discrimination complaints, including sexual harassment ([USU Policy 305 ([Links to an external site.])]), and has designated the Office of Equity Director/Title IX Coordinator as the official responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of sexual harassment.

**Withdrawal Policy and "I" Grade Policy**

Students are required to complete all courses for which they are registered by the end of the semester. In some cases, a student may be unable to complete all of the coursework because of extenuating circumstances, but not due to poor performance or to retain financial aid. The term 'extenuating' circumstances includes: (1) incapacitating illness which prevents a student from attending classes for a minimum period of two weeks, (2) a death in the immediate family, (3) financial responsibilities requiring a student to alter a work schedule to secure employment, (4) change in work schedule as required by an employer, or (5) other emergencies deemed appropriate by the instructor.

**Students with Disabilities**

USU welcomes students with disabilities. If you have, or suspect you may have, a physical, mental health, or learning disability that may require accommodations in this course, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) ([Links to an external site.]) as early in the semester as possible (University Inn # 101, (435) 797-2444, drc@usu.edu). All disability related accommodations must be approved by the DRC. Once approved, the DRC will coordinate with faculty to provide accommodations.

Students who are at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19 or who contract COVID-19 may also be eligible for accommodations.

**Diversity Statement**

Regardless of intent, careless or ill-informed remarks can be offensive and hurtful to others and detract from the learning climate. If you feel uncomfortable in a classroom due to offensive language or actions by an instructor or student(s) regarding ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, contact:

- Division of Student Affairs: [https://studentaffairs.usu.edu (Links to an external site.)](https://studentaffairs.usu.edu), (435) 797-1712, studentservices@usu.edu, TSC 220
- Student Legal Services: [https://ususa.usu.edu/student-association/student-advocacy/legal-services (Links to an external site.)](https://ususa.usu.edu/student-association/student-advocacy/legal-services), (435) 797-2912, TSC 326,
You can learn about your student rights by visiting:
The Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University: https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode

Grievance Process

Students who feel they have been unfairly treated may file a grievance through the channels and procedures described in the Student Code: Article VII.

Full details for USU Academic Policies and Procedures can be found at:

- Student Conduct
- Student Code
- Academic Integrity
- USU Selected Academic Policies and Procedures
- USU Academic Policies and Procedures
- Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility Policy

Emergency Procedures

In the case of a drill or real emergency, classes will be notified to evacuate the building by the sound of the fire/emergency alarm system or by a building representative. In the event of a disaster that may interfere with either notification, evacuate as the situation dictates (i.e., in an earthquake when shaking ceases or immediately when a fire is discovered). Turn off computers and take any personal items with you. Elevators should not be used; instead, use the closest stairs.

Mental Health

Mental health is critically important for the success of USU students. As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Utah State University provides free services for students to assist them with addressing these and other concerns. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS).
Students are also encouraged to download the "SafeUT App" (Links to an external site.) to their smartphones. The SafeUT application is a 24/7 statewide crisis text and tip service that provides real-time crisis intervention to students through texting and a confidential tip program that can help anyone with emotional crises, bullying, relationship problems, mental health, or suicide related issues.